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753 many times the doctors cannot help. They cannot give a second soul to the sick. If he has some more days to live, he will live; if not, he will die. Doctors are not God and even the doctors die as well."

761 In keeping with this fatalistic attitude toward sickness, the peasants accepted death as simply as they would any life process. Before I began my study of Dragalevtsy I was already familiar with the peasants' conception of death. One account which had proved helpful in gaining this understanding appeared in the *Bulgarian-British Review* back in 1931, and was written by Mrs. A. Vessova. She said in part:

● 775 761 "Death to these people is not considered the end; it is but the continuation of the earthly life in another sphere—the invisible world. The bounden duty of the family is to prepare the dying for their long journey so that they will not have to roam disconsolately in the darkness without finding their way to their new surroundings. Of the dying person they repeat to one another that he or she is now a traveler. Their first duty is to light a candle which they place above the head of the patient, so that they may not see it, should they happen to be conscious. Should the patient be allowed to die without lighting this particular candle, it is considered by the villagers to bring great discredit on the family. The meaning of the candle is that when the soul starts upon its long journey it has to pass through dark passages, and the candle will light the way.

". . . As soon as the neighbors hear the announcement [of the death] they immediately throw away all the water found in the house, and proceed to the fountain to replenish all their vessels. The same procedure takes place in the house of the deceased. There is no clear explanation for this custom or its real meaning, but it is supposed to symbolize, as do other customs, that as the water flows smoothly and evenly, so the voyage of the soul will be made smooth and easy.

764 775 "The peasants believe that though invisible the soul continues to keep the form of the body which it has just left. For this reason the deceased is laid to rest in his grave in his ordinary clothing. Led by his or her angel, for they believe that every human being at his

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birth receives a guardian angel, the soul of the deceased after leaving this world starts first to visit all the people and places where it has been when on this earth. This journey, no matter how great the distance may be, must be completed in forty days. If the departed has lived most of his time in his village, and only occasionally has gone to neighboring towns or villages, the journey will be an easy and pleasant one, but if he has traveled great distances the journey will be tiring and rough. It may be that this belief has been responsible for keeping the peasants so firmly attached to their land and village, and preventing them from migrating to new lands. . . .

"The soul has started on its journey, while the body is still in the house, being mourned by the family and the neighbors. The members of the family throw grains of corn or wheat into the coffin. They also believe that there is a great river to be passed and if the deceased has no money he will be unable to cross, and his journey will be impeded. Another peculiar belief is that the neighbors send through him messages to their departed, firmly believing that he will deliver them."

Investigation showed that these statements held true generally of Dragalevtsy but needed to be supplemented. For one thing, the villagers had definite ways of foretelling death. They said, for instance, that there were as many stars in the sky as there were people on earth, and that there was a particular star for each person. When a star fell to the ground, someone was said to have died and his star to have gone out like his soul. If the star merely moved from one place to another, then its particular earthly representative had changed his residence. Many peasants also believed that "stars with tails" (meteors) foretold some great misfortune to be sent by God. Usually they were thought to signify war "because before the Balkan War and the World War there were such." But there were even more specific ways of predicting death in any given locality. When the owls cried at sunset toward a house or when a hen crowed, death was sure to follow soon. Certain dreams indicated the coming of death. Bai Angel, the village registrar, told me that a soldier could be practically certain of death if he dreamed of a snake. He supported this belief with the story of an officer in the first World War who lined up his men before a battle and went down the ranks to shake hands with

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The girls of Dragalevtsy had no way of proposing to a boy. The girl waited and, if nobody proposed to her, she remained unmarried. 583 562

Sometimes unmarried young people had sexual intercourse. If the boy did not want to marry the girl, then she told her parents; the boy was brought before the *Obshtina* and, if the charge was proved, was made to marry the girl. As one peasant said in matchless understatement: "In such cases they do not have a happy life." 836

One such case occurred during my sojourn in the village and was an exciting topic of conversation. A girl with an unsavory reputation, in the hope of gaining a certain young man as a husband, accused him of having had intimate relations with her; the parents, too, insisted upon his marrying their daughter. He refused and the matter was taken up before the village court, where several of his friends swore that they likewise had had intimate relations with the same girl. Whether the friends swore truthfully or falsely was still a matter of doubt in the minds of many villagers, but the young man was freed from all responsibility in the matter. [691]

Chastity ranked high in the scale of village social values. Even though some couples had illicit relationships before they married, they were running a grave social risk. Public indignation was especially great in the case of illegitimacy. A girl giving birth to an illegitimate child was forced to leave the village. On this subject I had the following conversation with one of the more respected villagers: 848 836 558

"Where does the girl go if she is driven out of the village?"

"She goes to Sofia because she's a bad girl."

"Do the villagers try to find out who the father was and punish him for his part?"

"The father? Why should they? The girl is to blame, not the man."

"Are many illegitimate children born in the near-by villages?"

"In my time [the last thirty-five years] there have been two in Bistritsa, one in Dragalevtsy, and none in Simeonovo."

There was no particular stigma attached to being a widow or a widower, but the village mores decreed that, when remarrying, widows had to choose widowers, and vice versa. The explanation for this went back to the villagers' belief of the afterlife. They thought of 587 775

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[775] 587 Heaven in concrete terms and believed that husbands and wives would be reunited there. Things would work out quite well mathematically if a widow and widower remarried each other, since in Heaven each mate would go to the first spouse, thus avoiding the unheavenly complication of a second mate left alone for eternity. For a second wife, they listened to the recommendations of neighbors far more than they did when marrying the first time. This was borne out by the testimony of a woman I found picking berries from a bush that overhung a garden wall. While speaking to me she kept a watchful eye turned toward the near-by house in fear that someone would tell her to leave the berries alone. "How did you happen to marry Nikola?" I asked her. Like the other women she seemed to welcome a chance to talk about herself.

"For three years I was a widow in Simeonovo before somebody recommended me to my present husband, at that time a widower living here in Dragalevtsy. One day he came over to Simeonovo, looked me up, and asked me to marry him. I accepted right away although I had never heard of him before. Winter was coming on and I didn't have any money to buy food for myself and my little boy. I went immediately home with him and lived with him as his wife for two months before we were married."

Her second husband was one of the poorest men in the village, and her life was decidedly unhappy; yet to the village way of thinking, she was better off than as a widow.

593 Most of these second marriages turned out successfully provided the question of stepchildren could be satisfactorily settled. Sometimes fathers sent away their own children to a relative and gladly took in those of the second wife. Quite often the children of both the husband and wife were brought up together as one family. A second wife was generally anxious to have children by her second husband in order to ensure her place in his affections, especially if she had children by her first husband who ate up the food and wore the clothes provided by their stepfather.

587 837 Widows and widowers were permitted by public opinion to live together as though they were married for awhile before the actual ceremony took place. This above all else emphasized the fact that